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 New York Daily News _____
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Dole tries linking Bush, Noriega

From Chicago Tribune wires

Bob Dole has again escalated his attack on front-runner George Bush in the Republican presidential contest, trying once more to link the vice president to the Panamanian military leader, Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega.

Dole has been increasingly aggressive over the last few days in attacking the vice president, a clear indication that the senator from Kansas is trying to close a big gap in public opinion polls. Those polls show Bush running very well in the Southern states that hold contests on Super Tuesday next week.

Campaigning in New Orleans Wednesday, Dole raised questions about whether Bush, as director of the Central Intelligence Agency more than a decade ago, knew Noriega was involved in illegal drug activities while he was on the payroll of the CIA. Noriega was indicted recently by federal grand juries in Florida on drug-related charges.

Bush "said he made all those decisions at the CIA," Dole said at a news conference in New Orleans. "What were they? Was Noriega on the payroll when he was CIA director? ... There's some evidence he was on the CIA payroll for a long time. Some say he's been on the payroll since 1966. That's all I know right now."

Dole has been trying to connect Noriega and Bush for weeks, ever since there was a report, denied by Bush, that the vice president made a late-night phone call to Noriega

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asking him to warn Fidel Castro not to respond to the U.S. invasion of Grenada. Dole also has been trying to draw Bush into a public spat, aware that the vice president does not campaign well when he is on the defensive.

Bush was in Mississippi on Wednesday, pledging his support for a 600-ship Navy. He visited a shipyard where the USS Stark, the ship damaged by an Iraqi missile in the Persian Gulf, is under repair. He made no mention of the 37 sailors killed in the attack.

"National defense is a good issue down here in this particular region," said Bush spokesman Peter Teeley. "There's not only a strong feeling for national defense here but certainly you've got other jobs tied to it."

Teeley responded briefly to the Dole assertions, saying the Dole effort was beginning to sound more like the campaign of extremist Lyndon LaRouche. "We're not going to get involved in responding to a bunch of rumors that this guy has put out," Teeley said.

In other developments:

● Massachusetts Gov. Michael Dukakis on Thursday accused rival Richard Gephardt of trying to impose "a \$50 billion burden" on the nation's economy with an oil import fee. Appearing in Tyler, Tex., Dukakis defended his opposition to an oil import fee, which many in

the ailing Texas oil industry have hoped for. "We don't need that," said the governor, who instead favors incentives for small oil producers, repeal of the oil windfall profits tax and other measures to increase U.S. production.

● Sen. Paul Simon of Illinois said in Chicago Wednesday that he would use no television advertising in his state-based campaign, depending instead on name recognition, personal appearances and help from family members. After weak showings in the early primaries and caucuses, Simon has decided to focus his limited financial resources on Illinois and other Northern states.

● Democrat Jesse Jackson was to begin airing \$100,000 worth of TV ads Friday in Super Tuesday states and has borrowed \$410,000 to keep his campaign going until after that contest, his campaign manager says.

● Gephardt said he would consider former Presidents Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford to serve as special envoys to the Middle East if he is elected president.

● The results came in from Alaska's nonbinding preference poll, in which former TV evangelist Pat Robertson claimed 47 percent of the votes. Bush took second place with 24 percent and Dole was third with 20 percent. The poll included 2,020 precinct delegates, who will play the initial role in picking the state's 19 delegates to the Republican National Convention.